

As an employee in a large multinational corporation, you are temporarily assigned to your company's branch operations in Shanghai, China. You are a member of a team consisting of three Chinese engineers, all at the same rank as you. Your team reports to an engineering manager, who is also Chinese. You are in a team meeting where your manager proposes a solution to a difficult quality control problem. However, you are concerned that the proposed solution will fail. Consider these possible actions:

- a) Have the entire team approach the manager together.
- b) Bring up your concerns in the meeting.
- c) Set aside your concerns and follow the manager's lead.
- d) Discuss the issue with the manager later, in a private meeting.
- e) Consult your Chinese team members about appropriate actions to take.
- f) Discuss your concerns with a higher-ranking manager.

**Which of these actions (a-f) would you MOST likely take?
Why would you take this action? Please briefly explain.**

**Which of these actions (a-f) would you LEAST likely take?
Why would you NOT take this action? Please briefly explain.**

Global Engineering Competency Vignette #1

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hbat8X96m9g>

Instructor's Guide

Describe

This video vignette depicts a “production engineering team” having a meeting in a conference room to discuss a specific technical problem in a manufacturing plant. The opening caption suggests they are affiliated with a major multinational firm, and are located at a facility in Shanghai. Their conversation revolves around the team’s efforts to troubleshoot a quality control problem, with a particular focus on two possible root causes for high failure rates on one of the manufacturing lines (Line 4), namely “firmware” and “roller pins.” As the meeting progresses, two subordinates report on their efforts to check the firmware versions on all of the lines, while the manager appears convinced that the problem is with the roller pins and dictates further action in this direction. The video concludes with one of the subordinates expressing frustration and concern about how to handle this situation, particularly given his disagreement with the supervisor’s suggestion.

Interpret

A variety of cues suggest that the group consists of three subordinates who report to one engineering manager. One of the subordinates (Matt) appears to be male, American and a native English speaker. The other two subordinates (Qin, male and Fang, female) and the manager (male) seem to be Chinese natives and not native English speakers. The manager appears to be busy, confident, and a little impatient. The subordinates all look and act somewhat junior to the manager (in age and status), and are largely deferential to him. Many cues are given to indicate that the quality control problem is significant, with potential economic (and other) implications if left unresolved.

Evaluate

The protagonist (Matt’s) decision regarding how to handle this situation will likely require that he leverage domain/content knowledge (e.g., the responsibility of an engineer to take action when faced with a quality control problem), cultural knowledge (e.g., how groups work together and decisions are made in Chinese cultural context), and cultural sensitivity (e.g., responding appropriately when facing a difficult situation in a Chinese business context). There are a number of possible ways for the protagonist to respond:

- a) Have the entire team approach the manager together.

(EFFECTIVENESS: LOW-MODERATE) This course of action suggests adequate domain knowledge (i.e., needing to take action to address the issue), but a lack of cultural knowledge and sensitivity (i.e., this course of action could result in the

manager feeling as though he is being ambushed by the group, likely leading to a “loss of face”).

- b) Bring up your concerns in the meeting.

(EFFECTIVENESS: LOW-MODERATE) This course of action suggests adequate domain knowledge (i.e., needing to take action to address the issue), but a lack of cultural knowledge and sensitivity (i.e., this course of action could result in the manager “losing face” when challenged or questioned by a subordinate in front of the rest of the group).

- c) Set aside your concerns and follow the manager’s lead.

(EFFECTIVENESS: LOW) This course of actions suggests inadequate domain knowledge (i.e., professional responsibility suggests that the action should be addressed). However, it could suggest higher levels of cultural knowledge and sensitivity, as not taking action in this situation would show respect for the manager’s authority and position.

- d) Discuss the issue with the manager later, in a private meeting.

(EFFECTIVENESS: HIGH) This approach suggests adequate domain knowledge (e.g., professional responsibility to take action). It also suggests high levels of cultural knowledge and sensitivity, namely by allowing the manager to “save face” with the rest of the group – especially if he is wrong and you (the subordinate) is right. Other advantages to this approach include giving the manager the option of “owning” the solution, while at the same time being aware of your contribution. When given this scenario, most experts identify this course of action as the most effective response.

- e) Consult your Chinese team members about appropriate actions to take.

(EFFECTIVENESS: MODERATE-HIGH) This course of action suggests adequate domain knowledge (i.e., needing to take action to address the issue), albeit perhaps with low confidence. It may also suggest limited cultural knowledge (i.e., not sure how to handle the situation), as well as sufficient cultural sensitivity to seek out additional guidance on how to handle the situation appropriately. This approach also benefits from allowing you to share and vet both the technical and cultural aspects of this problem with your colleagues/peers.

- f) Discuss your concerns with a higher-ranking manager.

(EFFECTIVENESS: LOW) This course of action suggestions adequate domain knowledge (i.e., needing to take action to address the issue). However, it suggests inadequate cultural knowledge and sensitivity, as going above your manager is problematic in most cultures – and particularly so in the Chinese cultural context.